Tell Me a Story by Amy Friedman and Meredith Johnson

# The Hidden Folk (An Icelandic Folktale)

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The Hidden Folk, or Huldufolk as they are known, are similar to human beings in many ways. They look like us. They speak and laugh and dance and sing like we do. But they are different in many ways, with powers that we do not always understand. They do not live in houses or tents or teepees or igloos. Rather, the Huldufolk live in tiny houses tucked behind the rocks of Iceland.

Sightings of these people are rare, but the people of Iceland know about them. Indeed, they often tell the tale of how the Hidden Folk came to be. It happened, they say, long ago in the Garden of Eden.

It was in the days when Adam and Eve lived there with their children.

One day, God came to the garden for a visit while Eve was busy bathing the children. They had played all day, and they were dirty from swimming in streams and rolling in the muddy fields.

Adam called, "Eve, God has come to visit. Bring the children to see Him!"

Eve looked over her brood and shook her head. She did not want God to see the dirtiest children. Some had mud streaking their hair and faces; many had fingernails caked with dirt. Their feet were black as the soil, and their knees and elbows and necks were filthy. "You there," she called to those who had not yet bathed. "Go hide from God until I have had a chance to wash you."

The children ran away and hid behind the trees and flowers, under the shelter of rocks. Then Eve led the clean children into God's presence and announced, "Here they are, our children, bathed and dressed and ready to greet our Father."

God looked, and He began to count.

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight ...

"Where are the others?" He asked.

Eve could not admit that she had hidden some of her children, and so she said, "These are all of our children."

But everyone knows God knows everything. Naturally, He knew Eve had hidden some of the children, and He was furious with her for trying to play a trick on God.

"I'll have to teach you and the children a lesson," He said. "I know there are others, but since you have hidden them from Me, they will remain hidden forever."

That is how Adam and Eve's children became the first Huldufolk.

Over the years, stories of the Huldufolk spread, but as time passed, many began to believe they did not exist. And then one day a young man named Filip was traveling through the mountains when he lost his way. The sun began to set, and Filip stumbled along, worried about how he would ever find his way back to the path. Suddenly, to his delight, he saw a light in the distance, and he raced toward it. He was relieved to find a small farmhouse. He knocked on the door, and an old woman answered.

"Good evening," the woman said warmly. "May I help you?"

Filip nearly threw his arms around her and said, "Yes, please. I'm lost."

"Come in and sit with us for supper," the woman said. "And you must spend the night here. We'll guide you in the morning."

She led him inside, and Filip's mouth dropped open at the sight. There at the table sat five young women, each one more beautiful than the last.

"My daughters and I welcome you," the old woman said.

They enjoyed a feast, and Filip was delighted by the company. As the evening wore on, one girl in particular caught his eye. At last he reached for her hand, but she

pulled hers away.

When the meal was over, everyone began to move into the other room. Filip stepped close and attempted to embrace the beauty, but his hands passed right through her.

Terrified, he leaped back and was just about to rush out of the house when the old woman called from the other room.

"Don't be upset with her," she said. "Come sit by the hearth and we will tell you our story."

The old woman told a different story from any Filip had ever heard. She told him they were Huldufolk who came from a time when the devil revolted against God.

"The hidden people did not support the devil, but they did not support God either," the woman said. "And so God drove us away and forced us to live in the rocks."

She talked on through the night, and Filip came to love these people, and when he returned home, he told everyone all he had learned, and he explained the way the Hidden Folk worked. They like human beings, he said. But we must learn to communicate with them.

Some years later, the people decided to build a highway linking the Alftanes peninsula to a suburb of Reykjavik. Some protested the building, including Filip.

"It will cut through the land where the Huldufolk live," he said. "And it will destroy their church."

He began to negotiate, and at long last a solution was reached. The Huldufolk would not disturb the builders so long as they built their highway around the church. And so they did.

Sometimes we human beings are not careful, and we disturb the land of the Huldufolk. Rest assured, if we are not respectful, there will be trouble.

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